

THE GULL

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE GOLDEN GATE AUDUBON SOCIETY // VOL. 100 NO. 7 SUMMER 2016



BROWN PELICANS AT RISK...AGAIN

BY ILANA DEBARE

Brown Pelicans are among the Bay Area's most iconic birds—recognizable for their prehistoric silhouettes, squadron-like flight formations, and spectacular dives. Threatened with extinction by DDT in the 1960s, they were removed from the Endangered Species List in 2009. Now Brown Pelicans are at risk again—but Golden Gate Audubon Society and other Audubon chapters across California are stepping in to help.

PELICANS CONTINUED on page 5

Brown Pelican in San Francisco.
David Assmann





Ilana DeBare

GGAS board member Clay Anderson depicts a juvenile Night-Heron during the Heron Art Flash Mob.

CONSERVATION IS A TEAM SPORT

BY CINDY MARGULIS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

This spring, Golden Gate Audubon Society extended its work to protect Black-Crowned Night Herons in the very urban setting of downtown Oakland.

Two years ago, the U.S. Postal Service provoked viral media outrage when it hired a tree contractor to prune trees in which herons were nesting. Fortunately, International Bird Rescue was there to care for the young heron victims. IBR and GGAS released the birds together, and—seizing the media’s attention—GGAS launched a multi-faceted campaign to educate people

about bird-safe tree care. We presented at forums for professional arborists and urban foresters, and published a pamphlet in Spanish and English that has been used by local cities.

In spring 2015, we initiated efforts to protect all the herons nesting in Oakland’s downtown. We distributed posters informing neighbors how to help and led a series of public educational walks. While we couldn’t create a physical safety cordon around the extensive heronry, we found a way to draw a circle of compassion around the rookery.

Our very first Art Flash Mob in 2015 summoned local artists to portray these species in sidewalk chalk so passersby would look out for Oakland’s herons. This April, our second Flash Mob drew two dozen artists who covered an entire square block with gorgeous heron chalk art!

GGAS also trained 24 volunteer docents this spring to monitor the downtown heronry, educate the public, and watch for birds in distress. Young pre-fledgling herons falling onto concrete risk injuries from the hardscape as well as danger from cars, exposure, or starvation. So GGAS partnered with the Oakland Zoo to develop a rapid-response protocol. Our docents could call the Zoo’s professional animal handling team to rescue stranded herons and transport them to IBR for rehabilitation. It’s worked marvelously: Oakland Zoo helped us rescue more than 20 young herons! And our partners at International Bird Rescue proved again why they are the leading waterbird care center in the entire world.

Clearly, conservation is a team sport! Our wins are bigger and sweeter when celebrated with such worthy partners.

* * * * *

Collaboration is essential within as well as between organizations. Since becoming Executive Director, I’ve had the privilege of partnering with outgoing Board President Alan Harper. Alan has been a devoted champion for GGAS—whether meeting with county supervisors about protecting birds at the Altamont Pass or opening his home for our annual Birdathon Celebration. Thank you, Alan! I look forward to partnering with Diane Bennett, our new Board President.

NEWS BRIEFS

Seeking Centennial Volunteers...

Golden Gate Audubon Society is gearing up to celebrate our historic 100th birthday in 2017—and we need your help! We need volunteers to help organize a traveling museum exhibit, gala receptions, sponsorships, auction donations, videos about GGAS, and more. Whatever your interest, we have a role for you! Ready to help out? Want to know more? Please email Ilana at idebare@goldengateaudubon.org.

...And Seeking YOUR Stories and Photos!

As part of our Centennial, we’re collecting stories and photos from Golden Gate Audubon members over the years. Do you have photos from field trips in past decades? Favorite GGAS memories? How and why did you get involved with GGAS? What changes have you seen in Bay Area birding over the years? Please contact Ilana at idebare@goldengateaudubon.org or (510) 301-5573 to share your stories and photos.



(Left) Bob Lewis receives the Chandler Robbins Award from the ABA; (above) Birdathon fundraising winner Dan Harris receives his award from GGAS Communications Director Ilana DeBare.

2016 BIRDATHON WINNERS— AND SOME AUDUBON HEROES

BY ILANA DEBARE

This spring brought awards from outside as well as inside Golden Gate Audubon.

After six years, Golden Gate Audubon Society's annual Birdathon has become as much of a happy tradition as spring migration.

Some things were new about our 2016 Birdathon, such as exciting new trips like a behind-the-scenes tour of International Bird Rescue.

But other things were familiar: the enthusiasm of trip leaders and participants, the impassioned fundraising outreach by GGAS members, and the generosity of donors.

Thanks to everyone involved, Birdathon 2016 surpassed its goal and raised over \$63,000 for GGAS's conservation and education programs. Nearly 200 birders took part in 22 special field trips throughout April that resulted in over 550 separate donations.

The top fundraising award went, for the second year in a row, to Dan Harris. Dan set a new Birdathon

record by raising \$3,100 from over 60 friends and family members!

Other top fundraisers were Holly and Martin Bern, Jane Hart, and Pat Kirkpatrick. Meredith Williams won a new prize for top first-time Birdathon fundraiser.

Birding honors, meanwhile, went to Bob Lewis and his Hayward Shoreline field trip for Best Bird (Laughing Gull, a first sighting for Alameda County); Dave Rienecke and his East Bay Parks team for most species (146) in 24 hours; and Bob Power and his Southern Alameda County crew for most species (115) in six hours.

Our 2016 Elsie Roemer Conservation Award went to Cornelia "Corny" Foster, a GGAS volunteer who launched monthly habitat clean-up days at Crissy Field beach, an important roosting site for threatened Western Snowy Plovers and other birds.

Our 2016 Paul Covel Environmental Education Award went to Alan Kaplan, a GGAS field trip leader whose monthly walks in the East Bay hills overflow with both bird lore and a stunningly far-ranging knowledge of natural and social history.

Notably, this spring brought awards from outside as well as inside Golden Gate Audubon. We were delighted when GGAS member Leora Feeney was inducted into the Alameda County Women's Hall of Fame for her decades of work for birds and wildlife on the island of Alameda.

And we were thrilled when the American Birding Association chose GGAS board member and birding instructor Bob Lewis for one of their highest national honors, the Chandler Robbins Education/Conservation Award. ABA President Jeffrey Gordon presented Bob with the award at our June Speaker Series, just before Bob's talk on the birds and wildlife of southeast Asia.



Curtis Marantz

Immature male Brambling.

A VERY BIG CALIFORNIA YEAR

CURTIS MARANTZ

LOCATION / DATE

San Francisco
Thursday, July 21
6:30 p.m. refreshments
7 p.m. program

Curtis Marantz spent 2014 crisscrossing California in an attempt to find as many species as possible during a one-year period. He ultimately found 485—including every species that now breeds regularly in the state—and broke the previous record of 481 set in 1996 by Vernon Howe. Curtis will give an overview of how he set this new record, including stories about the birds seen (or missed!) while driving 40,000 miles in a single year. He'll show photos of the more unusual species.

Curtis Marantz received an M.S. in biology from Louisiana State University and a Ph.D. from the University of Massachusetts. His research examined vocal variation and systematics in groups of woodcreepers, a passerine family that occurs exclusively in the Neotropics. For his fieldwork, Marantz spent extended periods of time making audio recordings of woodcreepers and other birds in the forests of Brazil and Venezuela. He is now a biological consultant in Riverside.

San Francisco: First Unitarian Universalist Church and Center, 1187 Franklin Street (at Geary). Public transit, street parking, and parking in a lot for a fee are available. Directions: Visit www.uusf.org/visitors_faq.html, and use the Map It! link on the left.

Berkeley: Northbrae Community Church, 941 The Alameda (between Solano and Marin). Directions: www.northbrae.org/directions.html.

DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANTS ON THE BAY BRIDGES

MARK RAUZON AND
MEREDITH ELLIOTT

LOCATION / DATE

Berkeley
Thursday, August 18
6:30 p.m. refreshments
7 p.m. program

The Bay Bridge and Richmond-San Rafael Bridge have hosted the Bay Area's largest nesting colonies of Double-crested Cormorants for decades. But now these colonies are declining, and their nesting structures are being dismantled or blocked off for maintenance. Where will the cormorants nest in the future? Learn about this resilient species and what researchers are learning about the regional population of this adaptable yet maligned bird.

Mark Rauzon, a geography professor at Laney College, is a wildlife biologist specializing in seabird conservation. Meredith Elliott is a Senior Scientist at Point Blue Conservation Science who has worked on seabird monitoring.



Mark Rauzon

Double-crested Cormorants on the Richmond-San Rafael Bridge.

SEABIRD CONSERVATION IN THE FARALLONES

SEAN DENNY

LOCATION / DATE

San Francisco
Thursday, September 15
6:30 p.m. refreshments
7 p.m. program

The Greater Farallones National Marine Sanctuary along the central California coast protects some of the world's most productive waters, including the highest density of seabirds in the contiguous United States. Learn about the fascinating history of seabird conservation in the Farallones sanctuary, including historic activities on Southeast Farallon Island and current efforts to monitor and restore seabird populations.

Sean Denny is an Outreach Specialist for the Seabird Protection Network, a program of Greater Farallones National Marine Sanctuary. He has a Masters in Conservation Science and years of experience engaging the public in conservation issues both in the U.S. and abroad.



Ron LeValley

Common Murres in the Greater Farallones National Marine Sanctuary.

PELICANS CONTINUED from page 1

Brown Pelicans along the Pacific coast have endured a series of terrible breeding seasons, possibly linked to declines in forage fish populations. This year's breeding pairs numbered only 10 to 20 percent of the long-term average.

Golden Gate Audubon citizen scientists are gathering information that could help Brown Pelicans survive.

"We are contributing to scientific understanding of what is going on with this beautiful and troubled species," said GGAS Executive Director Cindy Margulis.

GGAS's involvement with pelicans is not new. Leora Feeney—founder of GGAS's Friends of the Alameda Wildlife Reserve committee—started doing twice-monthly California Brown Pelican surveys along Alameda's shoreline over 15 years ago.

Together with John Luther, she documented large numbers of pelicans roosting on an island breakwater next to the former Alameda naval air base. In the summer, they frequently found over 1,000 birds on that breakwater. One evening in 2006 they counted over 8,500!

Roost sites—places where birds can rest securely—are particularly important for pelicans. They use roost sites not only to rest overnight but to preen, warm themselves, socialize, and dry their feathers, which don't resist water.

Alameda's Breakwater Island roost faced an uncertain future with the decommissioning of the naval base. But GGAS used



Brown Pelicans roosting on the Alameda breakwater island.

Over 200 birders documented 6,500 pelicans at about 180 sites, including the Breakwater Island roost in Alameda.

Leora and John's data to argue for the roost's permanent protection—ultimately convincing the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, which took over the naval base in 2014, to include that area in the Alameda Wildlife Reserve.

Pelican biologists, who tend to focus on coastal roosts, traditionally had not viewed the Alameda site as significant. But GGAS citizen science helped put the breakwater "on the map" for researchers.

This spring, a biologist spotted a pelican there that had been rehabilitated and radio-tagged after the May 2015 Refugio oil spill in Santa Barbara County. Researchers were thrilled to find the bird alive and active 500 miles north of its release site. In addition, they tracked its repeated flights to and from the coast—showing how pelicans use the Alameda site as a colonial night roost from which they disperse each day to forage.

Meanwhile, GGAS joined with Audubon California, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, and other agencies in May 2016 in the first biannual Brown Pelican survey covering Baja California to Washington.

Over 200 birders documented 6,500

pelicans at some 180 sites, primarily in California. Of course GGAS members were counting at the Alameda roost!

During the count, John Luther noticed a pelican with a blue band, a sign that it had been rehabilitated by International Bird Rescue in Fairfield. But this wasn't just any banded pelican...it was the same bird that had been released the previous week in Sausalito, as part of a GGAS Birdathon "behind the scenes" trip to IBR!

Golden Gate Audubon's work touches all aspects of Brown Pelican conservation, as it does with other species. Out birding in the field, GGAS members sometimes rescue distressed birds and bring them to rehabilitation agencies like IBR. Our volunteers also report sightings of banded birds, generating data on bird survival and movement.

As citizen scientists, GGAS members take part in surveys like the pelican count that provide critical range-wide data. And as policy advocates, GGAS members speak out for birds and habitat in effective and informed ways—with meaningful results like preservation of Breakwater Island in the Alameda Wildlife Reserve.



Brown Pelican diving.

DONATIONS

Thank you for your generous donations to support our many conservation, education, and member activities!

Donations from March 1, 2016 through May 31, 2016

GOLDEN EAGLE

\$1000 or more

Alameda Point Partners, Mary Austin, Chris & Gary Bard, Holly Bern, Mary Betlach, Farella Braun + Martel, Daryl Goldman & Jeanette Nichols, Patricia Greene, Pat Kirkpatrick, March Conservation Fund, Craig Newmark, SCS Global Services, Stefan Williams

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Andrea Burhoe, Don Colberg, Jacqueline Craig, Alan Kaplan, Mary Krentz, Bethany Kristovich, Marie Lipman, Kelly Purcell, Anne B. Rowe, Alan & Ruth Tobey, Linda Vallee

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UPCOMING EVENTS

September Volunteer Training

Share the wonders of nature as a Burrowing Owl docent along the Berkeley shoreline or as an Eco-Education volunteer working with elementary school kids in San Francisco or the East Bay. For dates and info about September volunteer training dates, please contact nweeden@goldengateaudubon.org.

Restore Habitat with GGAS

Celebrate Coastal Cleanup Day with us on Saturday, September 19, at Pier 94 in S.F. or MLK Jr. Shoreline in Oakland—or volunteer during one of our many other habitat restoration days each month. Get outdoors, make a difference, spot birds! Dates and details at goldengateaudubon.org/volunteer.

Connect with GGAS online

We offer over 150 free bird walks each year! Learn about upcoming field trips and other birding events by email. Contact ggas@goldengateaudubon.org to receive our free monthly Field Trips and e-Gull e-newsletters. Or learn about upcoming field trips on our website or through Meetup.com.

Fall Classes Coming Soon

Sign up to become a better birder through our fall classes in Beginning and Advanced Beginning Birding, Birding by Ear, Water Birds, Birds of the Bay Area, and more. Our fall schedule will be posted in August. You'll find the details at goldengateaudubon.org/education/classes.

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Lee Karney

Restoring habitat at Pier 94.

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Anne Bergman, in honor of Pat Greene
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Eileen Cafferty, in honor of Holly Bern
Jane Hart, in honor of the GGAS Staff
Lois Hirsch & Dan Harris, in honor of
Everett Arthur Crook
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Ida Kuluk, in honor of Jeanette and Daryl
Pamela Llewellyn, in honor of Jim Llewellyn
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Holly Shepard, in honor of Jane Hart
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Nancy Tivol, in honor of Louise Harm, Cora Tivol,
and Jacqueline Craig
Carol White, in honor of Dan Harris

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Estate of Jill Bryans

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THE GULL AND WEBSITE

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NORTHERN CALIFORNIA BIRD BOX

Report your unusual bird sightings: 415.681.7422

The Golden Gate Audubon Society was founded January 25, 1917, and became a chapter of National Audubon in 1948. Golden Gate Audubon Supporting Membership is \$35 per year. Renewals should be sent to the Golden Gate Audubon office. The board of directors meets six times per year (schedule can be obtained from the office).

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www.goldengateaudubon.org

 The Gull is printed with soy-based inks on chlorine-free paper, 30% postconsumer waste content.

2 Protecting Oakland's Herons

How GGAS is partnering with wildlife rescue groups to save fallen heron chicks in the heart of downtown.

3 An "Awarding" Season

GGAS members racked up Birdathon awards as well as honors from outside groups during spring 2016.

4 Speaker Series

Join us on July 21 to learn about a California Big Year that totaled 485 species and set a new record.

BACKYARD BIRDER



Marsh Wren at Las Gallinas Ponds in San Rafael.

MARSH WREN
BY MIYA LUCAS

You're walking through a marshy area of reeds and cattails in spring or early summer when you hear a complex song of high trills and rattles—the Marsh Wren.

Only the male Marsh Wren sings, but he sings both night and day. It's estimated that the western Marsh Wren has over 200 songs in its repertoire, while the East Coast variant has only about 50. Like so many other birds, the male sings to attract a mate and protect

his territory. During mating season, you can usually see him balancing atop a reed or cattail.

Males often mate with two females, occasionally even three. Along with his song, he attracts a mate through construction of a nest. He typically builds more than six nests for every one that's occupied; in some areas the average number of nests per male is as high as 22.

It's surmised that the function of these extra nests is to provide decoys that protect the real nest from predators. These predators are often other Marsh Wrens, which seek out and destroy eggs of both wrens and other birds in their territory. For instance, they're notorious for killing Red-winged Blackbird eggs. It's possible they do this to ensure there is enough food for their own chicks.

When a female Marsh Wren enters a male's territory in mating season, he flips his tail wings up to his head, sings fast rapid songs, and then flies off. She may follow as he shows off his nests. If interested, she selects one nest, builds a step inside it, and layers the floor with feathers and grasses.

Marsh Wrens often have two broods—in early spring and then 1-2 months later in July or August. Incubation lasts approximately 11-14 days.

Only the female sits on the eggs. She feeds herself and chases off any male that gets near her nest. Meanwhile, the male sings and builds more nests to attract another female. Once a brood is hatched, the male sometimes helps with feeding them.

Marsh Wrens reside year round in the Bay Area and Delta. They are currently thriving and are listed as a species of least concern, although National Audubon predicts that climate change will shift their range northward and reduce their summer habitat.